

Climate Justice Task Force

Report to the Rt. Rev. Greg Rickel, Bishop Diocesan



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Executive Summary

“Creation itself is the first incarnation of Christ, the primary and foundational “Bible” that reveals the path to God.”

—Richard Rohr

Climate change is the greatest threat our church has ever faced. It is also the greatest opportunity we have ever had to show that our faith values can repair the immense breach we have inflicted upon Creation.

Reducing fossil fuel emissions requires a transformation of our relationship with Creation. We must end many social habits. We must end our tolerance of intolerance and our ignorance of the history of our harms to minorities and repair the breach that lives in our hearts. We must end the common understanding that Creation is simply a resource to be harvested or a profit to be had and renew our belief in the reality that all

of Creation is a sacred relation, a loving gift to be shared. We do not manage Creation. We are only one strand in the web of Creation in which harm to the least harms the whole.

We need not be scientists to understand climate change and we need not be theologians to understand our frayed relation with Creation. We have been profoundly misled into adopting habits of the heart and habits of the head that both threaten our existence and paradoxically suggest that there is nothing we can do to help ourselves.

As our ancestors long ago left comfort behind to flee Pharaoh for the promised land, we must now leave the comforts, habits, and beliefs that damage Creation. Although there is no quick way to free us from the results of the fictions we have lived, each of us has the tools we need. To succeed we must listen to ourselves and others as never before, we must lovingly examine and understand our false beliefs and resulting harms as never before, and we must love and support each other as never before. This is the only way to transform fundamentally how we see Creation, how we live within it, and how we repair the harms our systems and habits have inflicted.

Since Creation is interfaith, remedying the breach is interfaith. All faiths must hew to their duty to Creator and Creation. This work requires personal and congregational transformation. Fortunately, transformation is what our faith is about.

This report introduces some of the transformations we must undertake and then summarizes the latest on the science of climate change showing that we know what must be done scientifically but are stuck on what must be done politically. The scientific goals have been set by the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#), but, in the view of United Nations President António Guterres, developed countries are making empty pledges that fall far short of addressing the harm we have created.

As a faith-based community, we can model what must be done. Although we cannot heal the entire world with our work, we can heal the world *here*. If we do so throughout our diocese, then other communities and organizations will follow.

The first step is to pledge publicly to do so. Next, we must pledge to study the problem and our lives to understand and relinquish the fictions we've chosen to live by. Faith formation thus becomes a vehicle to renew our relationship with Creation and deepen our trust in and reliance upon one another.

Our willingness to be vulnerable is key because there is no quick fix. This is a long and deep voyage. It will be terrifying to let go of long-held beliefs, but it will be exhilarating to find new truths and unexpected joy that come from taking that risk.

We must think of this transformation as less a change of faith than it is a *growth* of faith: letting go of the unworkable in favor of the workable. This letting go should be done within a circle of profoundly trusted people who see and support one another as they are to assist them to become what they are called to be.

There is no single path. The many recommendations noted in this report sketch out the spectrum of what could work. Just as institutional transformation requires institutional investment, personal transformation requires personal investment. This report strongly supports hiring a Canon for Creation Justice. Due to the breadth of Creation Justice mandate, the Canon should expressly support First Nations and all others who have experienced environmental discrimination. Without a dedicated position, we cannot adequately support congregations and congregants in undertaking this journey. Climate change will change the roles our churches play in our communities: We are likely to become emergency centers during heat waves, fires, and other disasters. We also address these new roles in this report.

These actions will cost us time and money, but the cost of failing to invest and act will be far higher. Finally, the investment most critical to success is one we can all afford. That is *love*. Love fills the sails of our transformation. We need only let go of the shore.